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ABSTRACT

Whether linguistics is a scientific study is reviewed in the light of what linguists actually do professionally. Personal anecdotes illustrate the linguist's view of speech as the dominant language force and language as the vehicle of social interaction and communication. The work of George K. Zipf is commented on, and Morris Bishop's poem "The Naughty Preposition" is cited. Concluding remarks focus on the linguist's necessity to strive for objectivity in collecting and analyzing data. (RL)

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The Anatomy of a Linguist

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Often it is argued that linguistics is a scientific study of language; yet no one seems quite able to provide a simplified definition of linguistics, for to formulate such a confining statement is as dangerous as to argue that anthropology is simply the scientific analysis of man. Recurring frequently is the question as to what the linguists are attempting to do, and that interrogative is a version of the original question about what linguistics is.

To answer what the linguists are up to is to respond that they are, and have been for the past one-hundred years or more, engaged in a scientific study of a language or languages. A great deal of power lies in the adjectival <u>scientific</u> as it applies to language study, and at this point we ought to consider // s/ aI/ən/ tif/ Ik// as significant beyond its countable ten letters, its morphemes, and its phonemes.

All of us , in varying intensive degrees, quite naturally employ scientific language analysis. To illustrate, I share with you one

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of my own early linguistical scenarios, which may be referred to as "The Scarlet Umbrella Incident." Just after I had successfully completed my first course in Recent Trends in the Teaching of English, I was shopping in downtown Lawton, Oklahoma, where I noticed a singular Indian approaching. There was nothing in his demeanor indicating he wished communication, since his one-hundred and seventy-five pound bronzed and bared chest had no warring signals. I continued walking with my opened scarlet umbrella, a shield against Sol's brilliance that hot, sultry afternoon.

Arriving just in front of me and then blocking me, that young brave slowly pointed upward to my head. As the traditional text-book Indian warrior raised his mighty hand, sans the hatchet, to scalp me, he spoke instead: "Where ubhmbrellum?" In my crazed response, having just been scalped, I thought I observed some slight muscular relaxation about his mouth; nonetheless, I said in a high, loud voice, culturally acceptable for savages: "ME got um THERE." I pointed directly to a near-by bar just tow (two) doors away! Then, of course, I fled--backwards, leaving the Indian entering the bar. I fled because neither the history book nor the English text signalled any other justifiable

language protocol. When you think about them, though, the language signals were all present in a scientific and observable form. That is to say, we may equate the moving hand to the vocal cord, and, further, we may equate the relaxing muscle, evidenced at the mouth, to the behavioral objective established by the mind. The language measuring formula is: hand: vocal cord as mouth: behavioral objective. And with such a realistic device it may be observed that the warrior quite possibly just wanted to purchase a pretty umbrella for his wife, now living on the profits of their oil well.

Fleetingly, we have looked at the phenomena of a speech in the process of being uttered, and we may tag the whole process as <u>the stream of speech</u> in much the same manner as Sterne earlier implied the term <u>stream of consciousness</u> and Joyce, perhaps later, used it. We have just surfacely examined one mind in the process of working! Typically, the linguists are up to making just such illustrated studies because, in speech, the whole Labyrinth of a mind at work is offered; but, conversely, in the printed word, much of the phenomena is missing and the researcher studying only the paper-recorded symbolics

is more limited in research possibilities. Linguistics recognizes speech, therefore, as the predominant language force. Viewing the world from the linguists' point of view, the linguists conclude that the study of language is an imperative role in the study of man in general, for language is the vehicle of social interaction and communication. In speech, but in the printed word, too, the linguists are able to make studies of man.

In either event, speech or writing, the linguist maneuvers his particular study to a position to observe and analyze data so that he may set up a paradigm or paradigms for interpreting some delimited phase of communication in the study of man. Often the scientific paradigm, the set or unit of facts, may work well in one isolated linguistical study but may operate ambiguously in application to another rigorously-controlled forage into language. Grammatically, to supply an example, "amo, amas, and amat" is a pattern or a paradigm in the singular to produce "laudo, laudas, and laudit;" however, the observable language inflections are not the exacting paradigm to apply to "amabo, amabis, amabit." But what the linguist observes about language must be set up into paradigms just as Aristotle scientifically worked with the analysis of motion.

Unfortunately, as with many scientific investigations, the linguistical product often evades immediate application in the similar sense that the contemporary "moon rock" astronautical studies defy utility at the moment. There is, however, a branch of linguistical studies, generally referred to as applied linguistics, which in theory and practice fits the classroom teaching unit. Many of these studies rely heavily on the scientific knowledge about language studies made by earlier linguists: McDavit, Chomsky, Baugh, Zipf, Roberts, et al. George K. Zipf, a Harvard-educated linguist, represents contributors to the mass of knowledge now known about the English language.

He took a scientist's approach to language study; for him that meant pulling roses apart to count, to crush, and to scrutinize in the name of statistical analysis even if it meant to tabulate about what for most of us is: the aesthetic rose....is a rose. For Zipf, the scientific study of language meant the biological, psychological, and the social processes as well. Since he developed the famous "Zipf Curves," he has enjoyed acceptance for his right facts but has fallen to some unpopularity for his faulty explanations. Somehow Zipf has been guilty of some misinterpretation of gathered data, but the "Scarlet umbrella Incident"

illustrates the rapidity and difficulty with which one must survey data and make simultaneous decisions. Zip's statistical language frequency curves, sometimes now referred to as "statistical puzzles," are only a portion of his linguistical work. The Psycho-Biology of Language, in print again, merits reconsideration for the underlying issues it raises. A second look at Zipf may uncover more cognitive aspects of linguistical behavior.

Delving into what is so uniquely human about mankind, His whole array of linguistical symbolics, the linguist is up to working microscopically within a rigorously-controlled study selected from a broad panoramic language scope. In this tremendous breadth, linguistics has a demand on the psycho-biological studies, and it also depends upon areas such as phonetics to supply required data. Further, the study of the English language is open to much knowledge of scholarly etymology, for who would linguistically attempt to analyze Shakespeare, Chaucer, King Alfred's works, Byrd's "The History of the Dividing Line," Carroll's "Jabberwocky," or even attempt to understand many pieces of literature without some allusion to historical language data?

According to whatever study he chooses from the broad spectrum available, the linguist may choose to study the grammar of the language as well as its syntax. He is frequently submerged in exhaustive and minute details of morphology, even extensively employing tapes or other technological advantages to gather data on such things as suprasegmentation as it is noted by a slight breath intake or exhale in speech patterns. For that matter, though, so does the psychiatrist attach significance to similar speech signals. Today most neurologists view speech in terms of dynamic interrelationships and interactions between linguistics and other mental processes.

To mention another absorbing study quite often subjected to linguistical scrutiny is to list the dialectical studies, whether one limits his investigation to the Acoma Kerosen Indians of New Mexico or expands his horizons to the Pennsylvania Dutch or even focuses his research on a segment of Hoosier speech or writing.

The small but mighty preposition has quite possibly caused some teachers of the English language some discomfort. And there is always the eternal vigilance by these teachers for the awkward usage. Dominion

over management of the received rule that there whall be no prepositions to end a sentence with is assuredly a linguistical concern. Calling his poem "The Naughty Preposition," Morris Bishop in A Bowl of Bishop, Dial Press, 1954, summarizes quite well the endless struggle with the preposition:

I lately lost a preposition;
It hid, I thought, beneath my chair,
And angrily I cried: "Perdition!
Up from out of in under there!"

Correctness is my vade mecum
And straggling phrases I abhor;
And yet I wondered: "What should he come
Up from out of in under for?"

It would be an exciting study for any number of linguists to attack not only Bishop's lost preposition but also to lend scientific analysis to explanations for "slowing up" and "slowing down" as synonyms, since "up" and "down" are antonyms. And there's that small matter with respect to "dressing up." The realm of the preposition is also the kingdom of the linguist.

It is rightfully argued that the linguist does have a commitment to detail; he is up to thorough investigations within the disciplines of

psychology, biology, phonetics, etymology, grammar, syntax, morphology, and dialectology. After his statistical paradigms are formulated, he must interpret. Scientifically collecting data and sorting the data into paradigmatic form, the linguist works inductively. And he does find excitement in his quest for facts. He must make every human effort to avoid the blinding sociological barriers leading him to make wrong descriptions of his patient as was illustrated by"The Scarlet Umbrella Incident." His descriptions of the language must be accurate, the better to avoid wrongly diagnosing his patient. Much of the time, like Zipf, the linguist ends his study with minute details about the rose, even noting the worm at its roots.

Linguists are not simply applying new "hocus-pocus" terminology to old ideas, nor are they engaged in the mere pseudo-science of just counting letters, sounds, steppals, or gestures. Rather, the linguists employ the whole array of subjects falling within human communication. They are engaged in discovering the bridge from what man knows of himself

to what he does not know but inevitably must know! The structures of a bridge of this sort might well be the scientific paradigms formulated by linguists studying the breadth of man's communicative devices.